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CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND
GERMANY REGARDING AN ARMISTICE

*Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland to President Wilson*¹

LEGATION OF SWITZERLAND,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF
GERMAN INTERESTS

October 6, 1918.

MR. PRESIDENT:

I have the honor to transmit herewith, upon instructions from my government, the original text of a communication from the German Government, received by this Legation late this afternoon, from the Swiss Foreign Office.

An English translation of this communication is also enclosed. The German original text, however, is alone to be considered as authoritative.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) F. OEDERLIN,
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland,
In charge of German interests in the
United States.

MR. WOODROW WILSON,
President of the United States,
Washington.

(Enclosure)

Translation of communication from the German Government to the President of the United States, as transmitted by the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland, on October 6, 1918:

The German Government requests the President of the United

¹ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 9, 1918.

States of America to take steps for the restoration of peace, to notify all belligerents of this request, and to invite them to delegate plenipotentiaries for the purpose of taking up negotiations. The German Government accepts, as a basis for the peace negotiations, the program laid down by the President of the United States in his message to Congress of January 8, 1918, and in his subsequent pronouncements, particularly in his address of September 27, 1918. In order to avoid further bloodshed the German Government requests to bring about the immediate conclusion of a general armistice on land, on water, and in the air.

MAX, PRINCE OF BADEN,
Imperial Chancellor.

*The Secretary of State to the Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland.*²

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

October 8, 1918.

SIR:

I have the honor to acknowledge, on behalf of the President, your note of October 6th, enclosing a communication from the German Government to the President; and I am instructed by the President to request you to make the following communication to the Imperial German Chancellor:

Before making reply to the request of the Imperial German Government, and in order that that reply shall be as candid and straightforward as the momentous interests involved require, the President of the United States deems it necessary to assure himself of the exact meaning of the note of the Imperial Chancellor. Does the Imperial Chancellor mean that the Imperial German Government accepts the terms laid down by the President in his address to the Congress of the United States on the eighth of January last and in subsequent addresses, and that its object in entering into discussions would be only to agree upon the practical details of their application?

The President feels bound to say with regard to the suggestion of an armistice that he would not feel at liberty to propose a cessation of arms to the governments with which the Government of the United States is associated against the Central Powers so long as the armies of those Powers are upon their soil. The good faith of any discussion would manifestly depend upon the consent of the Central Powers immediately to withdraw their forces everywhere from invaded territory.

The President also feels that he is justified in asking whether the Imperial Chancellor is speaking merely for the constituted authorities of the Empire

² *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 9, 1918.

who have so far conducted the war. He deems the answers to these questions vital from every point of view.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my high consideration.

(Signed) ROBERT LANSING.

MR. FREDERICK OEDERLIN,

Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland ad interim,

In charge of German interests in the United States.

*Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland to the Secretary of State.*³

LEGATION OF SWITZERLAND,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF
GERMAN INTERESTS.

October 14, 1918.

SIR:

I have the honor to transmit herewith, upon instructions from my government, the original text, received this morning, of a communication from the German Government to the President of the United States, in reply to his communication to the Imperial German Chancellor, transmitted to me by Your Excellency on October 8, 1918.

I beg herewith also to enclose the English translation of this communication, as transmitted by the German Legation in Berne to the Swiss Foreign Office.

Accept, sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) F. OEDERLIN,

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland.

In charge of German interests in the
United States.

His Excellency,

ROBERT LANSING,

Secretary of State.

(Enclosure)

Translation of the reply from the German Government to the communication of October 8, 1918, of the President of the United States transmitted by the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland to the Secretary of State on October 14, 1918:

In reply to the question of the President of the United States of America the German Government hereby declares:

The German Government has accepted the terms laid down by

³ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 15, 1918.

President Wilson in his address of January the eighth and in his subsequent addresses as the foundations of a permanent peace of justice. Consequently, its object in entering into discussions would be only to agree upon practical details of the application of these terms.

The German Government believes that the governments of the Powers associated with the United States also accept the position taken by President Wilson in his addresses.

The German Government, in accordance with the Austro-Hungarian Government for the purpose of bringing about an armistice, declares itself ready to comply with the propositions of the President in regard to evacuation.

The German Government suggests that the President may occasion the meeting of a mixed commission for making the necessary arrangements concerning the evacuation.

The present German Government which has undertaken the responsibility for this step towards peace has been formed by conferences and in agreement with the great majority of the Reichstag. The chancellor, supported in all of his actions by the will of this majority, speaks in the name of the German Government and of the German people.

SOLF,

State Secretary of Foreign Office.

*The Secretary of State to the Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland.*⁴

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

October 14, 1918.

SIR:

In reply to the communication of the German Government, dated the 12th instant, which you handed me today, I have the honor to request you to transmit the following answer:

The unqualified acceptance by the present German Government and by a large majority of the German Reichstag of the terms laid down by the President of the United States of America in his address to the Congress of the United States on the eighth of January, 1918, and in his subsequent addresses justifies the President in making a frank and direct statement of his decision with regard to the communications of the German Government of the eighth and twelfth of October, 1918.

It must be clearly understood that the process of evacuation and the conditions of an armistice are matters which must be left to the judgment and advice of the military advisers of the Government of the United States and the Allied

⁴ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 15, 1918.

Governments, and the President feels it his duty to say that no arrangement can be accepted by the Government of the United States which does not provide absolutely satisfactory safeguards and guarantees of the maintenance of the present military supremacy of the armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field. He feels confident that he can safely assume that this will also be the judgment and decision of the Allied Governments.

The President feels that it is also his duty to add that neither the Government of the United States nor, he is quite sure, the governments with which the Government of the United States is associated as a belligerent will consent to consider an armistice so long as the armed forces of Germany continue the illegal and inhumane practices which they still persist in. At the very time that the German Government approaches the Government of the United States with proposals of peace its submarines are engaged in sinking passenger ships at sea, and not the ships alone but the very boats in which their passengers and crews seek to make their way to safety; and in their present enforced withdrawal from Flanders and France the German armies are pursuing a course of wanton destruction which has always been regarded as in direct violation of the rules and practices of civilized warfare. Cities and villages, if not destroyed, are being stripped of all they contain, not only but often of their very inhabitants. The nations associated against Germany cannot be expected to agree to a cessation of arms while acts of inhumanity, spoliation, and desolation are being continued which they justly look upon with horror and with burning hearts.

It is necessary, also, in order that there may be no possibility of misunderstanding, that the President should very solemnly call the attention of the Government of Germany to the language and plain intent of one of the terms of peace which the German Government has now accepted. It is contained in the address of the President delivered at Mount Vernon on the fourth of July last. It is as follows: "The destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere that can separately, secretly, and of its single choice disturb the peace of the world; or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at least its reduction to virtual impotency." The power which has hitherto controlled the German nation is of the sort here described. It is within the choice of the German nation to alter it. The President's words just quoted naturally constitute a condition precedent to peace, if peace is to come by the action of the German people themselves. The President feels bound to say that the whole process of peace will, in his judgment, depend upon the definiteness and the satisfactory character of the guarantees which can be given in this fundamental matter. It is indispensable that the governments associated against Germany should know beyond a peradventure with whom they are dealing.

The President will make a separate reply to the Royal and Imperial Government of Austria-Hungary.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my high consideration.

(Signed) ROBERT LANSING.

MR. FREDERICK OEDERLIN,

Chargé d' Affaires of Switzerland ad interim,

In charge of German interests in the United States.

*Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland to the Secretary of State.*⁵

LEGATION OF SWITZERLAND,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF
GERMAN INTERESTS.

October 22, 1918.

SIR:

By direction of my government, I have the honor to transmit herewith to Your Excellency the original German text of a communication dated October 20, 1918, from the German Government, which has today been received from the Swiss Foreign Office. I beg to also enclose an English translation of the communication in question as transmitted to the Swiss Foreign Office by the German Government with the request that it be forwarded to Your Excellency's Government.

Please accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) F. OEDERLIN,

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland.

His Excellency,

ROBERT LANSING,
Secretary of State,
Washington.

(Enclosure)

Translation issued by the German Government of its communication dated October 20, 1918, transmitted to the Secretary of State by the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland on October 22, 1918:

In accepting the proposal for an evacuation of the occupied territories the German Government has started from the assumption that the procedure of this evacuation and of the conditions of an armistice should be left to the judgment of the military advisers and that the actual standard of power on both sides in the field has to form the basis for arrangements safeguarding and guaranteeing this standard. The German Government suggests to the President to bring about an opportunity for fixing the details. It trusts that the President of the United States will approve of no demand which would be irreconcilable with the honor of the German people and with opening a way to a peace of justice.

The German Government protests against the reproach of illegal and inhumane actions made against the German land and sea forces

⁵ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 23, 1918.

and thereby against the German people. For the covering of a retreat, destructions will always be necessary and are in so far permitted by international law. The German troops are under the strict instructions to spare private property and to exercise care for the population to the best of their ability. Where transgressions occur in spite of these instructions the guilty are being punished.

The German Government further denies that the German Navy in sinking ships has ever purposely destroyed lifeboats with their passengers. The German Government proposes with regard to all these charges that the facts be cleared up by neutral commissions. In order to avoid anything that might hamper the work of peace, the German Government has caused orders to be despatched to all submarine commanders precluding the torpedoing of passenger ships, without, however, for technical reasons, being able to guarantee that these orders will reach every single submarine at sea before its return.

As the fundamental conditions for peace, the President characterizes the destruction of every arbitrary power that can separately, secretly and of its own single choice disturb the peace of the world. To this the German Government replies: Hitherto the representation of the people in the German Empire has not been endowed with an influence on the formation of the government. The Constitution did not provide for a concurrence of the representation of the people in decision on peace and war. These conditions have just now undergone a fundamental change. The new government has been formed in complete accord with the wishes of the representation of the people, based on the equal, universal, secret, direct franchise. The leaders of the great parties of the Reichstag are members of this government. In future no government can take or continue in office without possessing the confidence of the majority of the Reichstag. The responsibility of the Chancellor of the Empire to the representation of the people is being legally developed and safeguarded. The first act of the new government has been to lay before the Reichstag a bill to alter the Constitution of the Empire so that the consent of the representation of the people is required for decisions on war and peace. The permanence of the new system is, however, guaranteed not only by constitutional safeguards, but also by the unshakable determination of the German people, whose vast majority stands behind these reforms and demands their energetic continuance.

The question of the President, with whom he and the governments associated against Germany are dealing, is therefore answered in a clear and unequivocal manner by the statement that the offer of peace and an armistice has come from a government which, free from arbitrary and irresponsible influence, is supported by the approval of the overwhelming majority of the German people.

(Signed) SOLF,

State Secretary of Foreign Affairs.

BERLIN, October 20, 1918.

*The Secretary of State to the Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland.*⁶

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

October 23, 1918.

SIR:

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your note of the twenty-second transmitting a communication under date of the twentieth from the German Government and to advise you that the President has instructed me to reply thereto as follows:

Having received the solemn and explicit assurance of the German Government that it unreservedly accepts the terms of peace laid down in his address to the Congress of the United States on the eighth of January, 1918, and the principles of settlement enunciated in his subsequent addresses, particularly the address of the twenty-seventh of September, and that it desires to discuss the details of their application, and that this wish and purpose emanate, not from those who have hitherto dictated German policy and conducted the present war on Germany's behalf, but from ministers who speak for the majority of the Reichstag and for an overwhelming majority of the German people; and having received also the explicit promise of the present German Government that the humane rules of civilized warfare will be observed both on land and sea by the German armed forces, the President of the United States feels that he cannot decline to take up with the governments with which the Government of the United States is associated the question of an armistice.

He deems it his duty to say again, however, that the only armistice he would feel justified in submitting for consideration would be one which should leave the United States and the powers associated with her in a position to enforce any arrangements that may be entered into and to make a renewal of hostilities on the part of Germany impossible. The President has, therefore, transmitted his correspondence with the present German authorities to the governments with which the Government of the United States is associated as a belligerent, with the suggestion that, if those governments are disposed to effect peace upon the terms and principles indicated, their military advisers and the military advisers of the United States be asked to submit to the governments associated against Germany the necessary terms of such an armistice as will fully protect the interests of the peoples involved and insure to the associated governments the unrestricted power to safeguard and enforce the details of the peace to which the German Government has agreed, provided they deem such an armistice possible from the military point of view. Should such terms of armistice be suggested, their acceptance by Germany will afford the best concrete evidence of her unequivocal acceptance of the terms and principles of peace from which the whole action proceeds.

⁶ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 24, 1918.

The President would deem himself lacking in candor did he not point out in the frankest possible terms the reason why extraordinary safeguards must be demanded. Significant and important as the constitutional changes seem to be which are spoken of by the German Foreign Secretary in his note of the twentieth of October, it does not appear that the principle of a government responsible to the German people has yet been fully worked out or that any guarantees either exist or are in contemplation that the alterations of principle and of practice now partially agreed upon will be permanent. Moreover, it does not appear that the heart of the present difficulty has been reached. It may be that future wars have been brought under the control of the German people, but the present war has not been; and it is with the present war that we are dealing. It is evident that the German people have no means of commanding the acquiescence of the military authorities of the Empire in the popular will; that the power of the King of Prussia to control the policy of the Empire is unimpaired; that the determining initiative still remains with those who have hitherto been the masters of Germany. Feeling that the whole peace of the world depends now on plain speaking and straightforward action, the President deems it his duty to say, without any attempt to soften what may seem harsh words, that the nations of the world do not and cannot trust the word of those who have hitherto been the masters of German policy, and to point out once more that in concluding peace and attempting to undo the infinite injuries and injustices of this war the Government of the United States cannot deal with any but veritable representatives of the German people who have been assured of a genuine constitutional standing as the real rulers of Germany. If it must deal with the military masters and the monarchical autocrats of Germany now, or if it is likely to have to deal with them later in regard to the international obligations of the German Empire, it must demand, not peace negotiations, but surrender. Nothing can be gained by leaving this essential thing unsaid.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my high consideration.

(Signed) ROBERT LANSING.

MR. FREDERICK OEDERLIN,

Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland ad interim,

In charge of German interests in the United States.

*Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland to the Secretary of State.*⁷

LEGATION OF SWITZERLAND,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF
GERMAN INTERESTS.

October 28, 1918.

SIR:

I am instructed by my government and have the honor to submit to Your Excellency the original German text of a communication from the German Government, dated October 27, 1918, which has to-day been received from the Swiss Foreign Office.

I beg leave also to enclose an English translation of the above-mentioned communication, the German text of which, however, is alone to be considered as authoritative.

Accept, sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

F. OEDERLIN,

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland.

His Excellency,

MR. ROBERT LANSING,

Secretary of State of the United States,

Washington.

Translation of a communication from the German Government, dated October 27, 1918, as transmitted by the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of Switzerland on October 28, 1918:

The German Government has taken cognizance of the reply of the President of the United States. The President knows the far-reaching changes which have taken place and are being carried out in the German constitutional structure. The peace negotiations are being conducted by a government of the people, in whose hands rests, both actually and constitutionally, the authority to make decisions. The military powers are also subject to this authority. The German Government now awaits the proposals for an armistice, which is the first step toward a peace of justice, as described by the President in his pronouncements.

(Signed) SOLF,

State Secretary of Foreign Affairs,

BERLIN, October 27, 1918.

⁷ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, October 29, 1918.

*The Secretary of State to the Minister of Switzerland.*⁸

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON.

November 5, 1918.

SIR:

I have the honor to request you to transmit the following communication to the German Government:

In my note of October 23, 1918, I advised you that the President had transmitted his correspondence with the German authorities to the governments with which the Government of the United States is associated as a belligerent, with the suggestion that, if those governments were disposed to effect peace upon the terms and principles indicated, their military advisers and the military advisers of the United States be asked to submit to the governments associated against Germany the necessary terms of such an armistice as would fully protect the interests of the peoples involved and ensure to the associated governments the unrestricted power to safeguard and enforce the details of the peace to which the German Government had agreed, provided they deemed such an armistice possible from the military point of view.

The President is now in receipt of a memorandum of observations by the Allied Governments on this correspondence, which is as follows:

"The Allied Governments have given careful consideration to the correspondence which has passed between the President of the United States and the German Government. Subject to the qualifications which follow they declare their willingness to make peace with the Government of Germany on the terms of peace laid down in the President's address to Congress of January 8, 1918, and the principles of settlement enunciated in his subsequent addresses. They must point out, however, that clause two relating to what is usually described as the freedom of the seas, is open to various interpretations, some of which they could not accept. They must, therefore, reserve to themselves complete freedom on this subject when they enter the peace conference.

"Further, in the conditions of peace, laid down in his address to Congress of January 8, 1918, the President declared that invaded territories must be restored as well as evacuated and freed. The Allied Governments feel that no doubt ought to be allowed to exist as to what this provision implies. By it they understand that compensation will be made by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air."

I am instructed by the President to say that he is in agreement with the interpretation set forth in the last paragraph of the memorandum above quoted.

⁸ *Official U. S. Bulletin*, November 6, 1918.

I am further instructed by the President to request you to notify the German Government that Marshal Foch has been authorized by the Government of the United States and the Allied Governments to receive properly accredited representatives of the German Government, and to communicate to them terms of an armistice.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.
(Signed) ROBERT LANSING.

MR. HANS SULZER,

Minister of Switzerland,

In charge of German interests in the United States.